

Application Serial No. : 09/815,819

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CLAIMS

1. (Previously Presented) A method of controlling a telephone call to an instant messaging user, comprising the steps of:

- 5 (a) receiving at a call server a call directed to the user;
- (b) identifying an instant messaging service used by the user;
- (c) sending an instant message to the user through the instant messaging service to offer the user one or more options for responding to the call, wherein said options are based on a profile of the user;
- 10 (d) if no response is received from the user within a predetermined period of time, controlling the call as specified in a default option; and
- otherwise:
- (e) receiving an option selection from the user over the instant messaging service; and
- 15 (f) controlling the call as specified in said selected option;
- wherein when the user selects an option to answer the call over the instant messaging service, the controlling step further comprises the steps of:
- (f1) if the instant messaging service is communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing an audio
- 20 connection between the user and the caller;
- (f2) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to a speaker at the user's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user by enabling speech-to-text software conversion; and
- 25 (f3) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side,

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establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user  
by enabling speech-to-text and/or text-to-speech software conversion.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising determining a user  
5 name of the user for the instant messaging service.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more options  
include one or more of the set of: transfer the call, answer the call, take a  
message from the caller and play a message for the caller.  
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4. (Cancelled)

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is  
presented in said instant message as a hyperlink and said receiving said option  
15 selection comprises receiving a communication connection initiated by the user's  
selection of said selected option.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to play a  
message for the caller, the method further comprising recording a message from  
20 the user.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to play a  
message for the caller and said controlling comprises:

converting a textual message provided by the user into audio; and  
25 playing said converted message for the caller.

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8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step (f1) further comprises the steps of:

establishing an audio connection between the user and said call server;  
and

5 bridging the call onto said audio connection.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said audio connection between the user and the caller is established through the instant messaging service without further action by either the caller or the user.

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10. (Cancelled)

11. (Previously Presented) A method of handling a telephone call for a subscriber, comprising the steps of:

15 (a) receiving at a call server a call for a subscriber;

(b) identifying a first computer-implemented Instant messaging system used by the subscriber;

(c) sending a first instant message to the subscriber through the instant messaging system, wherein said first instant message includes a first set of  
20 options for handling the call, wherein said first set of options are based on a subscriber profile of the subscriber, and one or more of said first set of call handling options comprise links to said call server;

if the subscriber selects one of said first set of call handling options:

(d) receiving a communication connection from the subscriber, wherein  
25 said connection is initiated by the subscriber's selection of a call handling option that comprises a link; and

(e) handling the call as specified in said selected call handling option;

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wherein when the subscriber selects an option to answer the call over the instant messaging service, the controlling step further comprises the steps of:

(e1) if the instant messaging service is communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the subscriber's side, establishing an audio connection between the subscriber and the caller; and

(e2) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the subscriber's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the subscriber by using speech-to-text software conversion.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising:

if the subscriber does not respond to said first instant message within a predetermined period of time, handling the call as specified in a default call handling option.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising:

identifying the user by an original called number field of the call.

14. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising:

identifying the caller by a caller identification field of the call;

wherein said first instant message includes an identifier of the caller.

15. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said links are hyperlinks to said call server.

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16. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said receiving a call comprises receiving a call forwarded to said call server from a subscriber number originally dialed by the caller.
- 5 17. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising retrieving user names of the subscriber for one or more instant messaging systems.
- 10 18. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising sending a second instant message to the subscriber through an instant messaging system different from said first instant messaging system, wherein said second instant message comprises a second set of call handling options.
19. (Original) The method of claim 18, further comprising:  
if the subscriber selects one of said second set of call handling options:  
15 receiving a return instant message from the subscriber, wherein said return instant message includes an identifier of a call handling option selected by the subscriber; and  
handling the call as specified in said selected call handling option.
- 20 20. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises transferring the call and said handling the call comprises:  
transferring the call from said call server to a telephone number identified by the subscriber.
- 25 21. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises playing a message for the caller and said handling the call comprises:

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playing a message identified by the subscriber for the caller.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising converting said identified message from text to audio prior to said playing.

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23. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising recording said message prior to said playing.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 11, wherein step (e1) further comprises the steps of:

establishing an audio connection between said call server and the subscriber, without further action on the part of the caller; and

bridging the call onto said audio connection.

15 25. (Cancelled)

26. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein said establishing an audio connection comprises establishing an audio connection between said call server and a communication device on which the subscriber received said first instant message.

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27. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises taking a voicemail message from the caller and said handling the call comprises:

25 connecting the call to a voice recording module; and  
recording a message from the caller.

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28. (Original) The method of claim 27, wherein the subscriber chooses to screen said voicemail message, the method further comprising

5 establishing an audio connection between said call server and the subscriber; and

bridging said audio connection onto said voice recording connection.

29. (Previously Presented) A computer readable storage medium storing instructions that, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to perform a method of controlling a telephone call to an instant messaging user, the method  
10 comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving at a call server a call directed to the user;

(b) identifying an instant messaging service used by the user;

(c) sending an instant message to the user through the instant messaging  
15 service to offer the user one or more options for responding to the call, wherein said options are based on a profile of the user;

(d) if no response is received from the user within a predetermined period of time, controlling the call as specified in a default option; and

otherwise:

20 (e) receiving an option selection from the user; and

(f) controlling the call as specified in said selected option;

wherein when the user selects an option to answer the call over the instant messaging service, the controlling step further comprises the steps of:

(f1) if the instant messaging service is communicatively coupled to  
25 both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing an audio connection between the user and the caller; and

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(f2) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user by using speech-to-text software conversion.

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30-36. (Cancelled)

37. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 11, wherein said step of establishing verbal-textual communication between the subscriber and the caller  
10 further comprises use of text-to-speech conversion software.

38. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium of Claim 29, wherein said step of establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user further comprises use of text-to-speech software conversion.

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